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Recalled Cinnamon Applesauce Pouches Were Never Tested for Lead, FDA Reports + More

The Defender's Big Food NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to industrial food companies and their products, including ultra-processed foods, food additives, contaminants, GMOs and lab-grown meat and their toxic effects on human health. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff

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Recalled Cinnamon Applesauce Pouches Were Never Tested for Lead, FDA Reports

USA TODAY reported:

> The recalled cinnamon applesauce pouches contaminated with lead that sickened hundreds of children were not tested for the heavy metals at the manufacturing plant, a U.S. Food and Drug Administration investigation finds.
>
> An FDA document, first obtained by CBS News, details an inspection of the Austrofood factory in Ecuador that happened at the beginning of December. The inspection found that "numerous rough edges, chipped, and pitted areas" on a stainless-steel conveyor belt led to metal pieces breaking off and ending up in the final product.
>
> It also found that the raw cinnamon used by the plant contained lead, but the FDA states there are no other issues or illnesses reported involving other products containing cinnamon.
>
> The document states the factory did not test the raw ingredients or the finished apple sauce for traces of heavy metals. Aside from listing reasons the applesauce was contaminated with foreign metal bodies, the FDA's inspection found other sanitary issues at the plant.
>
> As of Jan. 19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says they have received a total of 385 reports on lead poisoning cases across 42 states tied to the recall.

'Everyone Is Affected': Pressure Grows on French Government to Strike Deal With Farmers

The Guardian reported:

> At the vast Rungis food market outside the French capital, wholesale fruit and vegetable companies were feeling the effect of French farmer protests, as tractors and hay bales blocked motorways in what some demonstrators have called the "Siege of Paris."
>
> French police warned that about 1,000 farmers and 500 tractors were barricading roads across France, and the protests could intensify this week over farmers' demands for better prices for their produce and more government support.
>
> The new prime minister, Gabriel Attal, told parliament on Tuesday that French farming is "our strength and pride". He promised France would work to extend an exemption on EU fallow land rules and Paris would set up an emergency fund for struggling wine producers alongside other help for farmers. But the farming crisis looked likely to continue all week.
>
> Amid massive public support for the farmers, concern is growing that if road blockades intensify, it could cause difficulties in the food supply chain this week.

Prisoners in the U.S. Are Part of a Hidden Workforce Linked to Hundreds of Popular Food Brands

Associated Press reported:

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A hidden path to America's dinner tables begins here, at an unlikely source — a former Southern slave plantation that is now the country's largest maximum-security prison.

Unmarked trucks packed with prison-raised cattle roll out of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, where men are sentenced to hard labor and forced to work, for pennies an hour or sometimes nothing at all. After rumbling down a country road to an auction house, the cows are bought by a local rancher and then followed by The Associated Press another 600 miles to a Texas slaughterhouse that feeds into the supply chains of giants like McDonald's, Walmart and Cargill.

Intricate, invisible webs, just like this one, link some of the world's largest food companies and most popular brands to jobs performed by U.S. prisoners nationwide, according to a sweeping two-year AP investigation into prison labor that tied hundreds of millions of dollars worth of agricultural products to goods sold on the open market.

The goods these prisoners produce wind up in the supply chains of a dizzying array of products found in most American kitchens, from Frosted Flakes cereal and Ball Park hot dogs to Gold Medal flour, Coca-Cola and Riceland rice. They are on the shelves of virtually every supermarket in the country, including Kroger, Target, Aldi and Whole Foods. And some goods are exported, including to countries that have had products blocked from entering the U.S. for using forced or prison labor.

Israel Becomes First Country to Approve Sale of Lab-Cultured Meat

The JC reported:

Israel has become the first country to approve the sale of lab-cultured meat based on beef, a process that effectively takes the animal out of the equation.

Rehovot-based food-tech company Aleph Farms says it will now be able sell steak grown from cow cells — the first company in the world to do so.

Israel is the global leader in the cultivation of meat grown from animal cells in labs. Food tech companies are hoping to bypass the environmental impact of the meat industry as well as address concerns over animal welfare.

Since being founded in 2017, Aleph Farms has raised around $140 million and lists actor Leonardo DiCaprio as an advisory board member.

Toxic Metals Could Harm a Woman's Ovaries

U.S. News & World Report reported:

Exposure to toxic heavy metals could cause middle-aged women to have more health problems as they grow older, a new study finds.

The study links toxic metal exposure to women having fewer eggs in their ovaries as they approach menopause. This condition — known as diminished ovarian reserve — could cause worse health problems during menopause and afterward, researchers say.

Heavy metals are common contaminants in drinking water, food and polluted air, researchers said. They are considered endocrine-disrupting chemicals that can affect human reproduction.

For the new study, researchers analyzed urine samples and blood tests taken from nearly 550 middle-aged women. The AMH blood test data went up to 10 years before the women entered menopause.

Colorado Considers Allowing Sales of Raw Milk in Latest 'Food Freedom' Legislation

The Colorado Sun reported:

Coloradans could buy raw milk at farms, farmers markets and roadside stands — but not grocery stores — under legislation aimed at giving consumers the power to choose their own food.

The "food freedom" bill would open up direct sales of unpasteurized milk, or milk that hasn't been heated to kill bacteria, from farmers to customers, but would not impact a creative workaround that for decades has allowed people who want raw milk to get it by purchasing shares in a sheep, goat or cattle herd.

Under a proposal that got a 7-0 vote in its first Capitol hearing Thursday, dairy farmers could choose to instead open up raw milk sales at their farm, or drive their containers of milk to farmers markets and roadside stands and sell them to any customers who stop by.

Business Bites: Steakholder Foods Reveals World's First 3D-Printed Shrimp

Food & Beverage Insider reported:

The plant-based market is having a moment. Valued at $11.3 billion in 2023, it's expected to more than triple in size over the next decade to reach a valuation of $36 billion by 2033, per Future Market Insights.

It's no surprise that these types of products are entering the marketplace in this category, including the most recent alt-seafood products from Steakholder Foods. Also in this week's column, StePacPPC unveils sustainable packaging that can extend the lifespan of fresh produce like mushrooms.

Food tech company Steakholder Foods is diligently working to create an array of alt-meat and seafood products using innovative 3D printing technology. On the heels of launching 3D-printed cultivated grouper and eel, the Israel-based company recently unveiled the world's first 3D-printed shrimp, which it said mimics the texture and flavor of conventional shrimp.

The plant-based shrimp was printed on Steakholder Foods' proprietary DropJet printer, designed for fish and seafood printing, using shrimp-flavored ink. With 7.6 million tons of shrimp harvested in 2023, according to the company, the 3D-printing solution offers a more sustainable, eco-friendly alternative to traditional shrimp farming.

Say Cheese! Inside Sargento Foods' Evolution Into a $2 Billion Dairy Giant

Food Dive reported:

> The family-owned cheese maker with nearly $2 billion in sales each year is not only profitable but posts annual growth of between 3% and 7% — eye-popping figures that have captured the attention of other food makers and investors interested in acquiring the 71-year-old business. But today, most suitors have just stopped calling.
>
> Two years after its founding, Sargento developed a way to vacuum seal cheese in plastic. This not only allowed larger blocks of the product to last longer in the marketplace but eventually led to the sale of sliced cheese.
>
> Sargento also claims to have introduced prepackaged shredded cheese in 1958. In addition, it brought the peg bar display to dairy aisles in the late 1960s, changing the way Americans shopped for cheese by making the bags more visible and aesthetically appealing.
>
> Sargento's history has been defined entirely by cheese, but Louie Gentine, the company's CEO, said he is challenging his team to take the company's success in innovation and brand building to other dairy categories, or an entirely new section of the grocery store, in the next two or three years.

'The World Is Changing Too Fast for Us': Organic Farmers on Urgency of French Protests

The Guardian reported:

> "We're fed up and exasperated," says Pierre Bretagne, 38. "I love my job — I farm organically because it's what I believe in and it's the right thing ethically and in terms of health. In nine years of farming, I've never been on a protest; I'd rather be with my animals. But things are getting so difficult — we need decent prices that reflect not just the quality of our produce but the love we put into this job and into the countryside. This is a passion, a vocation, but we don't get the recognition for it."
>
> The French government has been taken by surprise by the scale and fury of grassroots farmer demonstrations that have spread from the southwest across the whole country this week.
>
> Bales of hay and tractors have been used to block main highways; manure has been sprayed on public buildings and supermarkets in the southwest. Crates of tomatoes, cabbages and cauliflowers that farmers said had been cheaply imported were dumped across roads.
>
> Although the protests follow other demonstrations by European farmers in countries including Germany and Romania, the French protests have a particularly urgent and local political flavor. France, the EU's biggest agricultural producer, has thousands of independent producers of meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables and wine, who have a reputation for staging disruptive protests.
>
> Polls show massive public support for the farmers' protest — up to 90% —– but farmers say that French consumers, struggling to make ends meet and bamboozled by supermarkets, do not always choose French produce in shops.

Protesting Greek Farmers Plan Tractor Blockades of Highway Over Demands

The National Herald reported:

> Farmers in northern Greece, upset over issues they say jeopardize their livelihood have conducted protests that included driving convoys of tractors and said they intend to block the Egnatia motorway next week.
>
> It's in the regions of Kozani, Kastoria, and Grevena, the farmers driving tractors toward the towns to protest problems they said "threaten the sustainability of agricultural and livestock production."
>
> Dimitris Moschos, a farmer from Polykarpi in Kastoria, whose organic farm was awarded as the best in the EU in 2023, said that new measures have reduced income from plant and animal products "by an average of 52%."
>
> Farmers in Central Greece's Larissa and Karditsa also protested what they were delays from the government in subsidies for crops, livestock and farming equipment lost in deadly September floods that hit the agricultural heartland.

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